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THE STORM-TOSSED TRANSPORTS

Quae cum appropinquarent Britanniae et ex castris viderentur, tanta tempestas subito coorta est, ut nulla earum cursum tenere posset, sed aliae eodem, unde erant profectae, referrentur, aliae ad inferiorem partem insulae, quae est propius solis occasum, magno sui cum periculo deicerentur; quae tamen ancoris iactis cum fluctibus complerentur, necessario adversa nocte in altum provectae continentem petierunt.—CAES. *B.G.* iv. 28. 2, 3.

Various renderings of the latter half of this passage are given in our school editions, the interpretation hinging largely on the force attached to *tamen*. Editors for the most part range themselves in support of one or the other of two views. According to one of these, *tamen* means "in spite of the storm." As representatives of this view Johnston and Sandford may be taken. They annotate thus: "*tamen*, i.e., in spite of the storm; applies to *ancoris iactis* only. Translate freely, 'and though they did cast anchor in spite of the storm, yet as they began to fill.'"

This view was earlier set forth by Harkness, and finds support in the two best school editions by German scholars, that by Doberenz-Dinter and that by Kraner-Dittenberger. Reference to the latter of these shows that "in spite of the storm" means in spite of danger rather than in spite of difficulties. The note is as follows: "nachdem sie, obgleich der Sturm so heftig war, doch Anker geworfen hatten; sie thaten es trotz der Gefahr, um sich in der Nähe der Insel zu halten."

But this interpretation, it may be objected, is far from yielding a satisfactory meaning. The sailors who manned those transports cast anchor, if they cast anchor at all, not because the desirability of remaining off the coast of Britain was just then uppermost in their minds, but because they were under the instant need of in some way keeping out of the breakers and so avoiding shipwreck.

Feeling doubtless the unsatisfactoriness of this earlier view, Kelsey suggested another. His note runs thus: "*tamen*: with *ancoris iactis*, 'in spite of the fact that anchors had been thrown out.'"

He has been followed by Mather (Morris and Morgan's Latin series) in whose edition we read: "*tamen*: applies to the concessive abl. abs. *ancoris iactis*; 'and since, though they had cast anchor, they were nevertheless filling with water.'"

Again objection may be made, for there is no necessary opposition between casting anchor and a vessel's filling. If the storm was so violent that the transports were falling to leeward in spite of all efforts to hold them on their course, one might naturally expect that when rounded up and swung head to it at anchor they would pitch so heavily as to put their bows under. Both interpretations are alike objectionable from the standpoint of style. The imperfect subjunctive *deicerentur* pictures a situation, and a dangerous one. Between it and the maneuver finally resorted to in order to extricate the

vessels from their perilous position, the editors are agreed that there was an intermediate move—*ancoris iactis*—which, so far from proving a net gain, was but time and effort lost. And yet this move, which must only have complicated the situation and increased anxiety, is but cursorily mentioned and then in a subordinate way. If this is so, the compression is such as to constitute a fault.

No discussion of this passage would be complete without reference to whatever view may be entertained regarding it by Mr. T. Rice Holmes, who in his *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul* and in the companion volume, *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar*, has shown himself so abundantly able to enliven as well as to illuminate. On pp. 318-19 of this latter work we find a view radically different from either of those noted above. Taking as his point of departure the general principle that "a sailing-vessel, caught by a gale, must either run before the wind or lie to," Mr. Holmes assumes that the latter method of handling was followed in the case of those transports which were blown back to the starting-point, while in the case of the other group—that with which we are concerned—it was the former method that was applied. "The ships," he writes, "which were swept down past the Foreland and the Dover cliffs, scudded before the northeasterly gale; and, although they were evidently in no danger of being driven ashore, they were in great peril because only the most watchful steering could prevent them from broaching to: if a heavy sea struck the stern, it might swing the vessel round, and in a moment she would be overset and foundered."

One is naturally prompted to inquire the basis of Mr. Holmes's positiveness respecting the nature of the peril to which the ships were exposed. This is found below on p. 582. Here we read: "They were in no danger of being driven ashore; for while the gale was at its height they stood out to sea." This reasoning seems to me inconsequent. When Caesar says the ships were being carried out of their course, all we are to understand therefrom is that they were falling rapidly to leeward; and as he plainly tells us land was under their lee bow, the danger to which he refers is obviously that of striking. To avert this it was necessary to tack ship and stand off shore. But the fact that they did this while the gale was still at its height does not warrant the assumption that they were in no danger of being driven ashore when on the other tack standing westward.

What Mr. Holmes pictures for us seems to me pure surmise: the basis of his remarks is not so much the content of the passage as a theory regarding the proper handling of ships under like conditions. One should not fail to observe his peculiar rendering of the phrase *magno sui cum periculo*, "in great peril." Now *cum* in such phrases, as everyone knows, is regularly rendered by "at" or by "to." The latter fits here; i.e., it was the rapid drift of the transports in this southwesterly direction that was fraught with danger. To translate this phrase "*in* great peril" looks like a twist of *cum* for the sake of

making Caesar's words square with a preconceived notion on the part of the translator.

Again, according to Mr. Holmes, *deicerentur* pictures running before the wind—a deliberate move, that is, resorted to as one of the two methods of weathering a gale. But Livy xxiii. 34. 16 shows plainly that *deici* applied to ships refers, not to their scudding before a gale with plenty of sea-room, and so with no danger other than that of broaching to, but to their being swept upon some danger point to leeward.

Yet, aside from all this, Mr. Holmes's theory breaks down on internal evidence. If two methods of procedure were open to the Gallic sailors—either to run before the wind or lie to—why, I ask, after pursuing the former method for a time, did they subsequently anchor? If there was plenty of sea-room, and on this Mr. Holmes insists, no real sailor, having once started to run before the wind, would ever think of casting anchor except he had got into some sheltered position. And yet these Gauls, whose seamanship Mr. Holmes has no hesitancy in pronouncing skilful, are supposed suddenly to have let go anchor where, so far from being in the lee, their ships pitched and tumbled so heavily that the waves actually broke over them. This certainly was a blunder, and blunder number two if the vessels had really been running before the wind, for by so doing the shipmasters had not only wasted time and effort but had put themselves in a position which, as regards laying their course back to the continent, was much worse than that they occupied when it came on to blow. They were now forced to close-haul from a point just so much farther dead to leeward. Compared with their fellows in the other group of transports what a mess they had made of it—according to Mr. Holmes.

But let us get back to Caesar. From the context it is clear that the peril referred to was that of striking and going to pieces; that *propius solis occasum* is to be understood as indicating a southwesterly direction; and that the storm, consequently, was a northeaster. The transports, then, had been caught by a gale in that position so dreaded by mariners—"on a lee shore." What was to be done? Two courses of action were open—to cast anchor, or to put to sea. Whatever action was to be taken must be taken at once, and there must be no blunder; delay or miscalculation meant disaster. Was it expedient, then, to try casting anchor? Suppose after doing so they found they could not lie at anchor, would there still be time to make sail and keep clear? And again, what if an anchor would not hold, or holding left the cable to part later on in the night—how then? Such were the contingencies momentarily to be considered and weighed. In the face of such to cast anchor would have been to run a tremendous risk. No good seaman would have done so except as a last resort. Yet this is exactly what those who manned the transports are supposed to have done. What follows? That the sailors displayed bad judgment in thinking they could ride out on a lee shore a storm of this sort; that following this initial blunder the task of first getting up anchor, while the vessels were pitching and rolling and the sea at times breaking over

them, and then of making sail and filling off, with the attendant risk of falling still farther to leeward and possibly of being thrown on their beam ends before they gathered motion enough to give them steerage-way, was after all such a trivial matter as to be passed over with never a word of comment.

Caesar, it is true, was not primarily a shipmaster. But neither was he so downright a landlubber as to have fallen into any such absurdity of statement. By way of freeing him from imputation of this sort, I venture to suggest that anchors were not thrown out at all; that the ablative absolute here puts a hypothetical case merely; that *tamen* sets over against their present peril the danger involved in casting anchor; that the *cum*-clause defines the nature of this risk; that the subjunctive *complerentur* is one of Ideal Certainty,¹ being future to a past tense (Hale and Buck, 518 and *a*); and that Caesar is at pains to include the canvassing and rejection of this seeming possibility of casting anchor so that he may logically add *necessario* in what follows. Accordingly I should render: "And though they were to cast anchor, still since in that case they would fill, these latter, as their only recourse, standing to sea even in the face of night, headed for the continent."

ALFRED R. WIGHTMAN

CAMBRIDGE LATIN SCHOOL

MORE ABOUT *PRAEACUTUS*

Anent Professor Rolfe's discussion of *praeacutus* in the December number of the *Classical Journal*, I have noted a further passage, not mentioned by Forcellini, in which the word plainly means *valde acutus*. In Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 5.20, the treacherous sisters direct Psyche to take as a weapon against the unknown monster of the night "novaculam praeacutam adpulsu etiam palmulae lenientis exasperatam." Note the adverb *etiam*. To insure the sharpness of the edge, Psyche is to whet the blade on the palm of her hand. The blow is to be dealt with the edge and not with the point: "ancipiti telo illo audaciter, prius dextera sursum elata, nisu quam valido noxii serpentis nodum cervicis et capitis abscinde." The prefix *prae-* in *praeacutus* must therefore be intensive, a force to be seen elsewhere in this passage: Psyche's lamp is to be *praemicans*; her deed, *praeclarum*; after the discovery, chap. 22, "acuminis [i.e., "sharpness of edge," not "point"] sacrilegi novacula praenitebat." In placing this interpretation upon *praeacutus* as well as *acumen* I do not overlook the fact that Psyche's razor with its half-moon or sickle-shaped blade must have been *sharp at the end* also: in her remorse "ferrum quaerit abscondere, sed in suo pectore," which act of violence she could have scarcely performed except with the point of the razor.

F. WARREN WRIGHT

BRYN MAWR

¹ Lane, *Latin Grammar*, 1731, treats of the same use of the subjunctive under the category of "action conceivable." Caes. *B.G.* iii. 12. 1 is an instance in point. One might compare further ii. 17. 5: "cum iter agminis nostri impediretur."